BOOK ONE: THE IMPALER

DRACULA™

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WITH

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DRACULA™

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BOOK ONE: THE IMPALER

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"WELCOME TO MY HOUSE! ENTER FREELY AND OF YOUR OWN WILL!"

With those immortal words, readers for generations were introduced to arguably one of the most famous literary creations of the ages—the terrifying vampire lord, Count Dracula. For over a century, this urbane monster has represented the ultimate prototype of the supernatural predator in most people's minds. He has been portrayed in countless films, comics and novels and his iconic name is literally known all over the world.

Standing in the shadows of those myriad depictions and extensions of this legendary creation, one must ponder the question; does the world need *another* incarnation of Dracula?

Kelley Jones is the most acclaimed horror comics artist of our day, an illustrative maestro of all things malevolent and macabre. His richly textured ink lines combined with his atmospheric draughtsmanship have given spine-chilling life to a vibrant litany of nightmarish narratives over the years. He has amassed a loyal readership who love his unique and evocative art in all its forms. He's also been my dear friend for over thirty years.

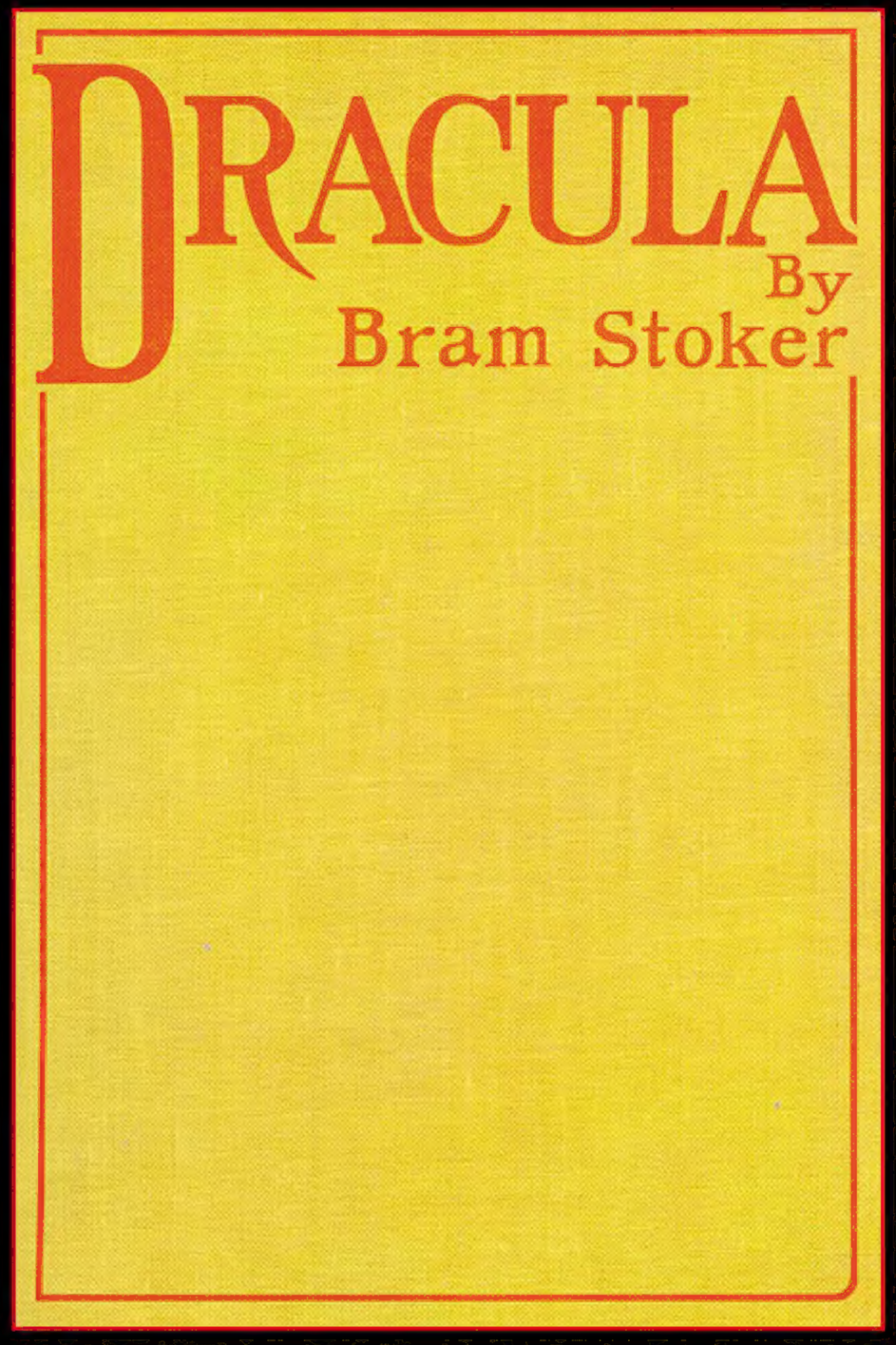
Kelley and I first met during various promotional signings when we'd both contributed art for the *Season of Mists* story arc in Neil Gaiman's blockbuster comics series, *The Sandman*. Kell and I hit it off immediately with our similar senses of humor and a mutual love for all things dark and monstrous. Ever since those earliest days of our friendship, we'd always intended to work together someday—a collaboration that we both felt certain would result in something unforgettable.

But, as is often the case, our lives and careers took us both in separate directions for many years until, during a recent exchange on social media, Kelley again revived the idea that, "We really do have to work together some day!" The only difference this time around was . . . I had an idea in mind that I thought would suit both of our interests and strengths. Anyone who's read *Grendel* knows that I've long had a fascination with vampires and entombed somewhere in that obsession was a desire to someday try my hand at a rendition of the grandaddy of all blood-suckers—the most famous vampire of all.

Author Bram Stoker was an Irish former civil servant turned theater manager who eventually also tried his hand at writing melodramatic and somewhat lurid novels to no great success. At some point in the early 1890s he encountered the legends and superstitions of Transylvania, an area that he never visited in person, and began to formulate the basis of a story centered around a character he originally christened "Count Vampyr". After years of making extensive notes outlining what was to become his most famous

novel, he made the fortuitous decision to change the name of his sinister title character to Dracula.

Opinions vary as to whether Stoker had much knowledge of the real-life Dracula, a fifteenth-century Wallachian warlord (a *voivode*) renowned for his merciless cruelty. Vlad III was the second son and heir of Vlad Dracul, his predecessor on the Wallachian throne and a member of the Order of the Dragon, a chivalric fraternity that also provided his surname—"Dracul" translates to "dragon" in the Romanian language and thus "Dracula" indicates Vlad III as the "son of the dragon". Due to his horrific preferred method for executing political and military prisoners, he also earned the infamous moniker of Vlad Tepes—"*The Impaler*." Again, whether Stoker fully intended his vampiric villain to be an undead version of this historical despot, the name along with the physical similarities and bloodthirsty legacy all combine to provide a chilling gravity that has only added to the character's nefarious allure.



The novel was first published in 1897 and, much like Stoker's other literary efforts, it garnered only middling sales and mostly tepid reviews. Still, something resonated about this story beyond the public's initial reactions. Much like its title character himself, *Dracula* refused to die as more and more people eventually fell under the novel's hypnotic spell and its popularity continued to grow. In fact, since its initial publication, the novel has never gone out of print. Eventually, a seemingly endless progression of film and stage adaptations all served to ensure the novel's enduring longevity.

So, again . . . what new could our project possibly bring to this well-trodden legacy? One of the most significant features of Bram Stoker's classic novel is the fact that it is *epistolary*—told entirely through the narrative form of letters and journals. And aside from a few indelible personal appearances, the novel Dracula is portrayed as more of a sinister force whose shadowy presence pervades the story but isn't on stage in person all that often. The many and varied film adaptations also often keep the vampire lord mostly relegated to the shadows, even in those more modern versions where he's portrayed as something of a supernatural heartthrob. The all-important voice and central character missing from these myriad depictions . . . is Dracula himself.

So, our entire project—a series of four graphic novels of which this is the first volume—will be narrated by the title character . . . and he definitely *won't* be a romantic figure. Our Dracula is a monster—a brilliant, ruthless and power-hungry warlord who tortured and murdered thousands of his adversaries, who sought out supernatural powers under the tutelage of

Satan himself . . . and that's all before he became a vampire! The collective story portrays an antagonist with a ravenous thirst for dominion and blood at all costs—a merciless leader of men who sacrifices everything to gain victory, only to achieve unearthly powers that prove to be as much a prison as they are an asset. Yet time and again, he rises from the ashes of defeat to stalk the earth once again.

Additionally, our version of Dracula will attempt to adhere tightly to the specifics found in the original novel without being yet another adaptation of the novel's central narrative. In addition to the many different film versions of that tale (each claiming to be truer to the source than any of its predecessors), there are also at least a dozen different comic-book varieties as well. Our graphic novels will unveil the tales beneath the surface and around the edges of the original book's storyline, the eerie hinted-at accounts that lie hidden behind the shadows of its mist-enshrouded settings.

When I first outlined my ideas for this project to Kelley, we both knew this was exactly the collaboration we'd been waiting for all these years. It felt like Dracula had been patiently waiting for both of us over the course of our long and accomplished careers . . . and it felt surprisingly strange that neither of us had ever directly addressed the character before. This is a project that feels like it was meant to be and, I can say with no irony, it presents some of Kelley's most personal and impressive work. Hopefully, mine too. We really hope you'll join us for all four volumes as we attempt to, once again, bring Dracula back from the dead.

Welcome to our house. Enter freely and of your own will.

—MATT WAGNER

The Draculas were, says Arminius,
a great and noble race, though now
and again were scions who were held
by their coevals to have had dealings
with the Evil One. They learned his
secrets in the Scholomance, amongst
the mountains over Lake Hermanstadt,
where the devil claims the tenth
scholar as his due.

–Bram Stoker

IT IS SAID THAT HISTORY IS MEMORY ENSHRINED. SOME MIGHT CLAIM... ENTOMBED.

FOR HISTORY BELONGS TO THE BOLD... THE VICTORIOUS.

THOSE WHO ARE RAVENOUS FOR POWER...NO MATTER THE COST. A CRAVING I HAVE MANIFESTED FOR CENTURIES.

I AM SUCH HUNGER... INCARNATE!

THIS, THEN, IS THE HISTORY THAT I HAVE WON.

AGAINST COUNTLESS ENEMIES AND ACROSS A THOUSAND BLOOD-DRENCHED BATTLEFIELDS.

FOR I AM THE *SON OF THE DRAGON...*

Dracula.

MY FATHER WAS A MEMBER OF THE SACRED *ORDER OF THE DRAGON.*

HE FOUGHT ENDLESSLY TO PROTECT HIS REALM FROM INCURSION BY OUR SWORN ENEMIES.

VOIVODE?

AS HIS HEIR, I CONTINUED THAT BATTLE WITH A STEELY FEROCITY THAT HAS SINCE BECOME LEGENDARY.

GOOD MORROW, NOBLE CONSTANTIN. HOW FARES THE DAY?

SOME MIGHT CLAIM... INFAMOUS.

GRIM, MILORD. THE TURKS' ARMY APPROACHES...AND THEY ARE AT LEAST FIVE TIMES OUR NUMBER.

THEY SEEK TO RECLAIM THIS TERRITORY AND THEY WILL STRIKE WITHIN THE HOUR.

FEH-- ONE OF OUR WARRIORS IS WORTH *TEN TIMES* EACH OF THOSE HEATHEN SCUM!

YES, MILORD... YET I STILL WORRY FOR THE OUTCOME.

BESIDES...WE HAVE ERECTED A FITTING *TRIBUTE* TO THEIR ARRIVAL.

Yaawn IT'S *MUCH TOO* EARLY TO BE AWAKE!

MILORD... YOU PROMISED US BREAKFAST. MEAT AND PORRIDGE!

SILENCE, SLATTERNS! SPARE HIS LORDSHIP YOUR PETTY WHINING!

HE IS THE *VOIVODE*... WARLORD OF ALL *WALLACHIA!*

WHY DON'T *YOU* WARM HIS BED THEN, LIEUTENANT?

ASSHOLE!

NO, GOOD CONSTANTIN. THESE WOMEN HAVE PROVIDED ME PLEASURE AND COMFORT.

SEE THAT THEY ARE REWARDED IN KIND.

BUT, NOW... LET ME WALK THROUGH THE FOREST I HAVE PLANTED TO WELCOME MY ENEMY'S ARRIVAL.

BATTLE OF TÂRGOVIȘTE. 1462.

AHHH... THERE IS NOTHING QUITE SO INTOXICATING AS THE SULTRY DEATH MOANS OF THE DEFEATED.

WHAT SWEET MUSIC THEY MAKE!

VOIVODE... YOU MUST HASTEN TO THE ARMORER'S AND BE FITTED FOR BATTLE. OUR ENEMY DRAWS DANGEROUSLY NEAR.

A BLOODY DAY DAWNS...WITH SCANT HOPE FOR TOMORROW. HAS THE *CONTINGENCY PLAN* BEEN PUT IN PLACE?

YES, MILORD. THE LIKENESS IS STRIKING. PRAY THAT WE HAVE NO NEED OF SUCH DESPERATE MEASURES.

INDEED.

IN NOMINE PATRIS ET FILII ET SPIRITUS SANCTI.

It had been nine years since the fall of *Constantinople* beneath the merciless onslaught of the Turkish *Ottoman Empire.*

The heathen Mohammedans then sought to extend their conquests northward...into the heart of our ancestral lands.

Bulgaria, Hungary, and Moldavia all fell to the forces of their sultan... *Mehmet II.*

a fate I had sworn to prevent for my sacred and beloved homeland-- *Wallachia.*

Captain! How fare our western flanks?!

Overrun, milord! The Turkish forces are too--

--grgh!

CHK

Voivode!

MILORD...THE ENEMY HAS BROKEN THROUGH OUR DEEPEST LINES ON BOTH THE EAST AND THE WEST! WE *MUST* RELY ON THE *OTHER* OPTION!

VERY WELL... *YES!* BE QUICK ABOUT IT!

SOLDIER... STEP FORWARD! AND PAY FEALTY TO YOUR SOVEREIGN LORD!

INDEED... A DISTINCT LIKENESS.

MILORD, VOIVODE...I AM YOURS TO COMMAND!

REST ASSURED, YOUNG PATRIOT...YOUR SERVICE WILL PROVE *MOST VITAL!*

CHOP

HURRY, MILORD... WHILE THERE'S STILL A PATH TO THE RIVER! A CART STANDS READY ON THE SOUTHERN BANK.

YOU ARE A MOST *FAITHFUL* COMPANION, CONSTANTIN.

SNAP

THE BATTLE RAGED ON FOR HOURS...

CHINK

...EVEN THOUGH THE OUTCOME WAS CERTAIN. THE SCREAMS OF THE WOUNDED AND DYING COULD BE HEARD FOR MILES.

A CACOPHONY THAT, GIVEN DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES... I WOULD HAVE SAVORED AS THE FINEST WINE.

I THINK WE ESCAPED UNNOTICED. AND NO ONE WILL RECOGNIZE US CLAD IN SUCH PEASANT GARB.

INDEED... YOUR SAFEGUARDS ARE ADMIRABLE, MY FRIEND.

BUT WE'RE NOT IN THE CLEAR JUST YET...

TURKISH SOLDIERS!

ALREADY... ***MEHMET'S*** VILE REACH IS EXTENSIVE.

‹HALT! THIS ROAD IS UNDER CONTROL OF HIS EXCELLENCY, THE SULTAN.›
‹CLIMB DOWN FROM THE CART.›

WHAT DO THEY WANT?
THEY SAY THE TURKISH ARMY HOLDS SWAY HERE.

‹IF IT PLEASES YOU, HONORED SIRS...WE ARE BUT HUMBLE FARMERS ON OUR WAY HOME. IF YOU WOULD LET US PASS--›
‹EAT SHIT, PEASANT!›

‹YOU MAY PASS... BUT WE HAVE NEED OF YOUR CART.›
‹ON YOUR WAY, INFIDEL...AND PRAISE BE TO *ALLAH* THAT YOU MIGHT OFFER SUCH A GIFT TO THE SERVICE OF YOUR NEW RULER.›

HEATHEN BASTARDS. IF THIS WERE *MY* COURT... I'D HAVE THOSE WRETCHED TURBANS *NAILED* TO YOUR BLOODY HEADS!
‹INSOLENT DOG!›

MILORD--!

UNGH--

THWAK

HAHAHAHAHA!

<LOOK... THEY MUST BE IN LOVE!>

<ON YOUR WAY, PERVERTS!>

THAT WAS BRAVE OF YOU. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

YES, MILORD. MY HEAD RINGS... BUT I'LL BE FINE.

THIS WAY, MILORD... OFF THE ROAD.

HERE...I LAID A SECRET CACHE OF SUPPLIES, WEAPONS, AND COIN.

ONCE AGAIN...YOUR PRUDENCE IS INVALUABLE.

I LIVE BUT TO SERVE YOU, MILORD. YOU ARE *WALLACHIA'S* FINAL HOPE.

MILORD... FAR BE IT FROM ME TO QUESTION YOUR JUDGMENT. BUT...ARE YOU *SURE* THIS PLAN OF ACTION IS OUR ONLY RECOURSE?

THE OTTOMAN FORCES ARE INSURMOUNTABLE BY ANY OF OUR NATIVE RESOURCES. TO SEE *MEHMET* DEFEATED, I MUST LAY CLAIM TO POWERS *BEYOND* THE NATURAL WORLD.

TO ACHIEVE THAT GOAL, I AM PREPARED TO SACRIFICE *ANYTHING.*

MY FIRST BRIDE... WAS A TENDER AND FRAGILE SOUL. SO BEAUTIFUL... YET UNSUITED FOR THE ROLE OF A WARLORD'S WIFE.

WHEN MY BROTHER *RADU* LED A REVOLT TO UNSEAT MY RIGHTFUL CLAIM TO THE THRONE, SHE TOOK HER OWN LIFE AFTER SHE HEARD RUMOR THAT I'D BEEN KILLED IN BATTLE.

SHE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THE RIGORS ONE MUST ENDURE TO CLAIM VICTORY OVER *ANY* ADVERSITY.

TO DEFEAT THE GODLESS... ONE MUST EVEN *BECOME* GODLESS.

AAAOOOOOOO

WOLVES!

YES... ALL AROUND US.

WE'RE SURROUNDED!

YET ANOTHER BATTLEFIELD...

GRRRRRR

GREETINGS, MY FEROCIOUS ONE! I ADMIRE YOUR AGGRESSION... BUT YOU FACE NO DOCILE PREY TONIGHT.

HAVE A CARE, MILORD! THEY ARE BRAVER IN NUMBER...

SNIFF

WHIINE

WHAT HAPPENED?

WHAT COULD'VE CAUSED THEM TO RUN AWAY LIKE THAT?

WAIT, I HEAR SOMETHING... OUT THERE IN THE DARK.

AND, MOTHER OF GOD... THAT RANCID *SMELL!*

GHAAGHH

JUDAS BE DAMNED!

MILORD, GET BACK! IT IS A *WURDULAC*-- ONE OF THE WALKING DEAD!

I WILL GUARD YOU AGAINST THIS GHOUL FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE!

WHAK

UNGHH--!

BEGONE, REVENANT! GO BACK TO YOUR ROTTING HOLE IN THE GROUND!

MILORD... BEWARE!

SPAWN OF THE DEVIL! IT'S...STUCK--

GHAH!

THINK

NNAAAGH!

R-RELEASE ME, FIEND!

CONSTANTIN... LOOK OUT!

FOOSH

WOOOSH

YAAGGH!!

AAAEEGGGH!

I-I THINK IT IS GONE, MILORD. BUT COMFORT YOURSELF BY THE FIRE.

I WILL STAND WATCH IN CASE THE CREATURE RETURNS.

CONSTANTIN FLORESCU WAS TRULY ONE OF MY MOST LOYAL AND DESERVING VASSALS.

I WILL REMEMBER HIM ALWAYS.

YOU'RE CERTAIN THIS IS THE WAY?

YES, MILORD.

THROUGH THE MISTY GLEN AND ACROSS THE FORBIDDEN HILLS.

WELL...IT APPEARS WE ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK. AND I CAN SEE WHY THESE WOODS ARE "FORBIDDEN."

MILORD... I-I FEAR WE SHOULD NOT VENTURE ANY FURTHER.

SUCH TALISMANS ARE A SIGN OF DARK FORCES...AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS.

YES...*EXACTLY* AS THEIR WEAVER WOULD HAVE US DO. I WILL NOT BE DETERRED, SO VERY CLOSE TO OUR GOAL.

MILORD... I-I FEEL ILL... UNWHOLESOME. THE TALISMANS... S-SO HARD TO... GO ON--

M-MY HEAD REELS... LIKE AFTER...TOO MANY FLAGONS OF WINE.

SWEET JESUS, I...I-- BLEEGH!

C-COURAGE, MY FRIEND...WE *MUST* PRESS ONWARD.

I-I THINK I SEE A CLEARING AHEAD...

AT LAST... W-WE MADE IT!

TH-THE FEELING PASSES...

I NEEDED GUIDANCE TO ACCESS AND CLAIM THE POWER I CRAVED.

THE LOCAL PEASANTS SPOKE IN HUSHED TONES OF *MARTA ȚIGAN'S* DOMAIN--A GYPSY SORCERESS OF DIRE RENOWN.

STILL...IT WAS SAID *SHE* COULD PROVIDE THE SECRETS I PURSUED.

TAKE HEED AND *BEWARE*... YE ARE NOT WELCOME HERE. PROCEED ONLY... AT YOUR OWN *PERIL!*

MILORD...TH-THIS IS BLACK MAGIC, MOST FOUL!

WE SHOULD AVOID SUCH A PLACE!

NO, CONSTANTIN...

WELCOME, *VLAD III*, KNOWN AS THE *DRACULA*... VOIVODE OF ALL WALLACHIA!

YOU HAVE COME SEEKING OLD *MARTA ŢIGAN*, ISN'T IT SO? MAYHAP SHE DOES NOT *WISH* TO BE SOUGHT!

THIS IS *EXACTLY* WHAT I CAME FOR!

A RUTHLESS WARLORD...WITH THE BLOOD OF MANY LIVES STAINED ON YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL! YOU THINK IT MATTERS TO MARTA WHAT YOU *REQUIRE?*

INDEED, CRONE, I *AM* THE SOVEREIGN PRINCE OF THIS LAND...AND I REQUIRE YOUR AID--

YOU *"REQUIRE"* MARTA'S AID! YOU *ARE* AN ARROGANT ONE, ISN'T IT SO?

YOU MAY *ASK* OF WHAT YOU SEEK... BUT MARTA WILL *REQUIRE* SOMETHING IN RETURN.

PAY THE PRICE... OR SPARE ME YOUR PIOUS DEMANDS.

SPEAK!

I SEEK... ADMITTANCE TO *THE SCHOLOMANCE!*

THE DEVIL'S OWN SCHOOL OF THE DARK ARTS!

YOU HUNGER FOR POWER BEYOND HUMAN RECKONING, ISN'T IT SO? TO WIELD FORCES FAR MORE TERRIBLE THAN OLD MARTA'S HUMBLE HEXES AND CRAFTS.

AND WHAT WOULD YOU OFFER FOR SUCH CAPACITY?

ANYTHING. ASK WHAT YOU WILL OF ME.

SP-THD

ANSWER HIM, HAG! WHEN *VLAD DRACULA* GIVES AN ORDER, YOU WILL--

PEACE, GOOD CONSTANTIN. WE ARE POSTULANTS HERE...

SILENCE, BOY... AND LET YOUR MASTER TAKE HEED.

INDEED, MARTA KNOWS WHERE AND HOW TO FIND THE DREADED *SCHOLOMANCE!* BUT SUCH GUIDANCE WILL COST YOU *DEARLY*, DRAGON-SON!

FOR IT IS ONLY YOUR VITAL *SEED* THAT WILL BUY MY AID.

MOUNT AND *RUT DEEP* WITH OLD MARTA; YEA, UNTIL THE COCK CROWS O' THE MORN...AND YE SHALL HAVE WHAT YE DESIRE!

WHAT?! HIS LORDSHIP... COUPLE WITH *YOU?!* YOU *BLASPHEMOUS WHORE!*

MILORD...ABANDON THIS FOOLISH QUEST! SURELY, IT'S NOT WORTH LYING WITH THIS...THIS DECREPIT, SNAGGLETOOTHED--

CONSTANTIN... ENOUGH. YOUR LORD ORDERS YOU TO STAND DOWN AND OBEY.

MAKE CAMP OUTSIDE TONIGHT... WHILE I ATTEND TO WHAT *MUST* BE DONE.

ALL RIGHT THEN, CRONE...LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH. COME AND COLLECT YOUR UNSAVORY TOLL!

"OVER WITH"? YOU'LL NOT GET OFF THAT EASILY, DRAGON-SON!

Hee-heeee... MARTA'S HUNGRY QUIM WILL MILK YOUR REGAL JUICE UNTIL THERE'S NARY A DROP LEFT IN YOUR STONES!

AND YOU HAVE *PLENTY* TO GIVE... ISN'T IT SO?

FOR THE FIELD ONCE WAS FALLOW...

LET IT NOW BE MADE FLUSH!

FOR THE FLESH ONCE SO WITHERED...

LET IT NOW BE MADE LUSH!

CAST OFF THE RAVAGES...

OF MERCILESS TIME...

AND BEAR FORTH THE ECHOES...

OF YOUTH, MOST SUBLIME!

WHAT SAY YOU, DRAGON-SON? HOW TALL WAVES YOUR STAFF FOR FAIR MARTA *NOW*?!

AM I NOT... FAR MORE *SUCCULENT*?

COME, OH ROYAL STALLION.

MY FIELD YEARNS FOR SOWING... AND YOU HAVE *ACRES* TO PLOW THIS NIGHT!

THE TRANSFORMED HAG WAS AS GOOD AS HER WORD.

THE LONG NIGHT PASSED IN A FEVER DREAM OF RAW CARNALITY.

'TIL I FELT DRAINED OF ALL VIGOR...AS EMPTY AS A BLOODLESS CORPSE.

AAOOOOAAOOOO

AWAKEN, MY FRIEND...

THE SUN CLIMBS IN THE SKY... AND WE MUST HASTEN TO LEAVE THIS GRIEVOUS PLACE.

I HAVE CRESTED THE NIGHT, CONSTANTIN... AND RISEN TO SEE A NEW DAY.

BUT, THE WITCH...DID SHE--?

MY... MILORD! ARE YOU...*WELL?* DID YOU--?

BUT NOW WE MUST GO... FOR I FEAR I COULD NOT WEATHER ANOTHER SUCH ENCOUNTER.

YES... I NOW KNOW WHERE WE MUST GO.

OUR JOURNEY WAS LONG...TO THE REMOTE AND RUGGED SHORES OF *LAKE HERMANNSTADT.*

A TREK MADE EASIER BY MY COMRADE'S AFFABLE MANNER.

MILORD...HOW DID YOU COME TO KNOW THE LANGUAGE OF THE TURKS?

WHEN I WAS TEN YEARS OLD, MY BROTHER RADU AND I WERE EXCHANGED AS HOSTAGES TO THE COURT OF *MURAD II,* THE CURRENT SULTAN'S SIRE.

I LIVED AMONG THE HEATHEN FOR SEVEN YEARS.

FROM THEM, I LEARNED MANY THINGS...ASTRONOMY, MATHEMATICS, AND PHILOSOPHY.

BUT FROM THEM, I ALSO LEARNED... WHAT IT MEANS TO BE *MERCILESS.*

THE WAY IS TOO STEEP... WE MUST PROCEED ON FOOT.

MILORD... I THINK WE ARE ALMOST THERE. THE AIR GROWS COLD AND MOIST...THERE *MUST* BE WATER NEARBY!

A WELCOME RESPITE, INDEED!

I WILL SEE YOU SAFELY REACH YOUR GOAL, MILORD. AND I...*I--!*

BLESSED CHRIST!

SNRF MENTION NOT THE NAME OF GOD *HERE*, NOMAD.

FOR BEYOND THIS POINT... YOU ENTER *THE DEVIL'S ACREAGE!*

AND *NONE* MAY PASS FURTHER WITHOUT A BLOOD TOLL.

DEATH AND SUFFERING... THEY ARE *HELL'S CURSED CURRENCY!*

STAND ASIDE, UNHOLY FIEND! YOU WILL NOT TOUCH SO MUCH AS A HAIR OF THE VOIVODE'S HEAD!

FEAR NOT, MILORD... I WILL DEFEND YOU!

I... I WILL--

SQUISH

MILORD? I...I DON'T--

PEACE, GOOD CONSTANTIN. TRULY... YOU WERE A MOST FAITHFUL AND VALUED COMPANION.

SHOT

BEHOLD, DEMON!

I OFFER BLOOD TOLL TO SECURE MY PASSAGE.

SNRF!

SKSH

alone now... I ventured onward, up steeper and steeper inclines.

without constantin's steadfast fealty, I never would've made it this far.

I will remember him... always.

CHMP! CHMP!

PROCEED.

FOR FINALLY...I HAD ARRIVED AT *LAKE HERMANNSTADT.*

HOME OF THE LEGENDARY *SCHOLOMANCE*...WHERE THE DEVIL HIMSELF GATHERS STUDENTS TO TRAIN IN THE DARKEST AND MOST ARCANE SORCERIES.

ALL THE POWER I WOULD EVER NEED TO DEFEAT MY HATED ENEMIES.

BUT WHERE AND *HOW* TO ENTER THOSE DIABOLICAL RANKS?

MARTA'S INSTRUCTIONS WERE SCANT ON SUCH SPECIFICS.

FOR MORE THAN A WEEK, I SEARCHED THE LAKE'S PERIMETER...FINDING NOTHING.

WINTER WAS NEAR... AND THE ELEMENTS HARSH.

OF WATER, THERE WAS PLENTY...EVEN THOUGH THE LAKE'S DEPTHS TASTED STALE AND RANK.

GAME WAS SCARCE AND I HAD NO ARROWS TO FELL ANY FLEET-FOOTED BEASTS.

I CAUGHT RATS AND, EVEN THOUGH I WOULD NOT DINE ON THEIR STRINGY FLESH... I DRANK THE BLOOD TO SUSTAIN MYSELF.

DESPAIR CONSUMED ME. HAD I REALLY COME SO FAR, SACRIFICED SO MUCH...ONLY TO LOSE EVERYTHING *THUS*? STARVING AND LOST LIKE SOME PEASANT...

DESPAIR...GAVE WAY TO RAGE.

NO... I WILL NOT SUCCUMB!

I AM **VLAD DRACULA...** PRINCE OF WALLACHIA! SCOURGE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE!

I DEMAND ENTRANCE AND AUDIENCE! *HEAR ME,* OH DEVIL--

YES, IMPALER... I HEAR YOU.

AND I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.

YOU'RE LATE, IN FACT.

BUT THE SWEET SCENT OF YOUR CRUELTY HAS ALWAYS BEEN SO VERY DELICIOUS. YOU ARE... A SUPPLICANT WORTH WAITING FOR.

Y-YOU ARE TRULY... *SATAN?*

LUCIFER?

I AM HE. SHE. THEY. IT.

ONE AND THE SAME. I HAVE BORNE MANY NAMES.

AND WHAT TESTIMONY IS THERE TO BEAR WITNESS TO YOUR CLAIM?

WHAT PROOF DO YOU OFFER THAT YOU ARE INDEED THE FIRST FALLEN ANGEL...THE SOVEREIGN *LORD OF HELL?*

AH, YOU ARE A PLUCKY ONE.

YOU DEMAND TESTIMONIES? BEHOLD.

W-WHAT APPARITIONS ARE *THESE*?!

THE SOULS OF EVERY UNFORTUNATE VICTIM YOU'VE HAD CONDEMNED TO THE STAKE.

MOST ALL DIED UNCONFESSED AND UNREDEEMED. YOU HAVE SWOLLEN THE RANKS OF MY KINGDOM MOST EFFECTIVELY.

BAH... WHAT CARE I FOR THESE DOOMED AND DESPERATE SPIRITS?

I'D IMPALE EACH AND EVERY ONE *AGAIN* IF IT SERVED TO HASTEN MY ENEMY'S DEFEAT!

OH, YES... YOU'LL DO QUITE NICELY.

BUT NOW, COME WITH ME. AS I SAID, YOU WERE LATE... AND THE OTHERS ARE WAITING.

WHERE... ARE WE GOING? I HAVE SEARCHED ALL OVER THIS LAKE...AND FOUND NOTHING.

WHAT YOU SEEK HAS NO WORLDLY INGRESS, IMPALER.

IT IS BY MY INVITATION ALONE THAT ONE MAY GAIN ENTRANCE TO THIS DOMAIN.

WHICH I EXTEND TO YOU NOW.

CAST OFF YOUR EARTHLY TRAPPINGS... AND FORSWEAR ALL ALLEGIANCE TO GOD IN HEAVEN, AND HIS BASTARD SON.

IN SO DOING, YOU WILL BECOME A CREATURE OF DARKNESS, AND ACCESS POWERS UNKNOWN TO OTHER MORTAL MEN.

SO I DO SWEAR...I WILLINGLY REJECT THE DOMINION OF GOD AND THE ETERNAL RESURRECTION OF HIS ONLY SON.

I DENY THE HOLY ROMAN CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, AND THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

MY SINS ARE MINE OWN.

HAIL SATAN!

AND WITH THAT DECLARATION... I ENTERED A TWILIGHT WORLD.

I KNEW NO SUCH CAVERN EXISTED ALONG THE SHORE OF THE ACTUAL LAKE.

YET THERE I STOOD... CLOAKED IN THE VESTMENTS OF SORCERY.

AVE TENEBRIS ET VARDE IMPERIUM

LIKE A BAT IN THE DARKNESS, I FELT THE ECHOES OF DARK ENERGY FROM FAR BELOW.

THE ENTRY, NOW UNMISTAKABLE.

WITH EACH STEP DOWNWARD, I FELT REVIVED AND REFRESHED.

AS IF I'D BEEN BORN AGAIN.

THUS CONVENES MY ELITE ACADEMY...

...THE SCHOLOMANCE!

GREETINGS, *VLAD THE IMPALER*. TAKE A PLACE AMONG YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS...THE FINAL SLOT IN THE ANOINTED *CIRCLE OF POWER*.

AND SO THE RING IS FORGED.

WELCOME... OH SCHOLARS OF THE DARK SCIENCES.

HERE, YOU WILL LEARN THE ARCANE ARTS THAT UNLOCK POWERS AND FORCES THAT OTHER MEN FEAR.

YOU WILL PURSUE THESE DISCIPLINES FOR SEVEN YEARS, DURING WHICH TIME, ALL OF YOUR EARTHLY NEEDS WILL BE PROVIDED TO YOU.

YOUR INSTRUCTION IS YOUR OWN RESPONSIBILITY. WITHIN THE HALLS OF MY PRIVATE LIBRARY LIE THE SECRETS AND TOOLS OF EVERY DARK SORCERY.

FOR THE LENGTH OF YOUR TENURE, ALL THE LANGUAGES OF MAN SHALL BE KNOWN TO YOU. IT IS *YOUR* DUTY TO UNCOVER THE KNOWLEDGE THAT LIES HIDDEN FROM THE MUNDANE WORLD.

YOU ARE ALSO REQUIRED TO MAINTAIN A JOURNAL OF YOUR MASTERY... A *SCHOLOMANAR* BY WHICH YOUR PROGRESS WILL BE MONITORED.

YOU MAY NEITHER HELP NOR HINDER EACH OTHER IN THE COURSE OF YOUR STUDIES. THIS RULE... SHALL BE *STRICTLY* ENFORCED.

AS YOU ARE NOW CREATURES OF MY TUTELAGE, YOU SHALL SUFFER NO EXPOSURE TO SUNLIGHT FOR THE LENGTH OF THIS RESIDENCY.

YOU MAY LEAVE THIS SUBTERRANEAN COMPLEX AS YOU CHOOSE... BUT BEWARE THE DAYLIGHT AS YOU WOULD A DEADLY TOXIN.

IN EACH OF YOUR PRIVATE BEDCHAMBERS, THERE IS A MIRROR. IF YOU FACE DIFFICULTY, YOU MAY THREE TIMES ASK FOR GUIDANCE... AND THE GLASS WILL ANSWER.

THREE TIMES ONLY.

AT THE END OF YOUR TRAINING, YOU WILL BE CAST BACK INTO THE WORLD OF MEN... AS ENVOYS OF MY DARK DOMINION.

YET THERE IS *ONE* OF YOU... WHO WILL ENJOY MY SPECIAL CONSIDERATION.

ONE AMONG YOU... WILL EARN THE RIGHT TO BE MY CHAMPION.

GO NOW... AND JUSTIFY MY PATRONAGE.

AVE TENEBRIS ET CARPE IMPERIUM.

"HAIL DARKNESS AND SEIZE DOMINION."

SATAN'S OWN LIBRARY.

REPOSITORY TO EVERY CODEX, GRIMOIRE, AND SPELL-SCROLL WRITTEN SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME.

SURELY, HERE I WILL GAIN THE EXTRAORDINARY MEANS TO DESTROY *ALL* MY ENEMIES.

MY FELLOW NOVICES GAWK AND MARVEL LIKE PEASANTS.

REAL BOOKS! I HAVE...NEVER SEEN *SO MANY!*

ENOUGH TO RIVAL FABLED *ALEXANDRIA!*

Agh... *READING!*

BUT I AM NO GROVELING SYCOPHANT.

IN THIS AS IN ALL THINGS...I SHALL *DOMINATE.*

STILL...THE DEVIL'S ASSEMBLED COLLECTION OF ARCANE KNOWLEDGE IS TRULY IMPRESSIVE.

WHILE THE OTHERS SCRAMBLE TO LEARN BASIC CHARMS AND INCANTATIONS, I SPEND THE FIRST MONTHS OF OUR TENURE SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION ABOUT OUR INFERNAL HOST HIMSELF.

I UNEARTH EVERY ACCOUNT OF HIS DIABOLICAL HISTORY, SOVEREIGNTY, AND LIMITATIONS.

FORTIFYING MYSELF IN THE EVENT THAT SOMEDAY... I MAY HAVE TO KILL THE SON OF A BITCH.

ISSA LORTEM

Satanam regat INFEK CUM LIBIDO ET CU ODIO HABET REGNU

OMNES TENEBRAE SUPER

THE ACCOMMODATIONS WERE, AS PROMISED, ENTIRELY COMFORTABLE. EVEN BY NOBLE STANDARDS.

AND, THOUGH I DID NOT COME HERE TO MAKE FRIENDS, MY COMRADES' PRESENCE DID HELP PASS THE TIME.

EVEN THOSE I WOULD NORMALLY CALL "ENEMY."

THE PRECEPTS OF MAGIC ARE, IN MANY WAYS, NO DIFFERENT THAN PHYSICS OR MATHEMATICS.

ALL ARE GOVERNED BY IMPLACABLE LAWS.

WHAT WOULD YOU KNOW OF LAWS, JALAL? YOU'RE THE SAME AS EVERY OTHER RAGHEAD...

I'LL NOT REST UNTIL YOU'RE *ALL* DRIVEN FROM MY HOMELAND!

EXCUSE ME, MY FRIEND. YOU'LL OBSERVE...NO TURBAN ON *THIS* SKULL. AND I'VE AS MUCH REASON AS *YOU* TO HATE THE OTTOMAN TURKS.

EVER SINCE THEY CONQUERED THE ***MAMLUK SULTANATE,*** EGYPT HAS BEEN A VASSAL NATION. I, TOO, SEEK TO EXPUNGE THEIR PRESENCE!

WELL... HERE'S TO SHARING MY QUEST WITH YOU THEN, FINE SIR. EVEN IF YOU *ARE* A RAGHEAD!

STILL, I NEVER IMAGINED TO HAVE ACCESS TO SUCH POWER... AT THE BEHEST OF A MERE BLACK-EYED CHILD!

"A CHILD"? TO WHOM DO YOU REFER?

OUR HOST... *SATAN!* HE IS AS ANCIENT AS THE HEAVENS... YET APPEARS NO MORE THAN A CHILD OF SEVEN OR EIGHT.

BY "OUR HOST," I ASSUME YOU MEAN *SHAITAN*, AN ASPECT OF THE *IBLĪS*, THE DEFILER.

AND NO... HE IS AN OLD FAKIR, WITH PRONGED HORNS AND TEETH LIKE DIAMONDS.

Pfft... SPOKEN LIKE A MAN! *SHE* IS CALLED *ADRO*, THE SHADOW SELF...AND SHE APPEARS AS AN ENORMOUS BLACK SNAKE WITH ONLY ONE EYE!

WHAT WOULD A *FEMALE* KNOW OF SUCH THINGS? WHY ARE YOU EVEN HERE, TROLLOP?

BECAUSE I REFUSE TO BE EITHER VICTIM OR SLAVE, YOU JACKASS! WHERE I COME FROM, WOMEN ARE LITTLE MORE THAN *CHATTEL.*

AND I REJECT SUCH A FATE.

I CARE NOT THAT WE HAVE A WOMAN AMONG OUR RANKS. I SEEK ONLY TO CRUSH AND DECIMATE MY ENEMIES.

YOU THERE... NORTHERNER. HOW SEE YOU OUR DARK AND MYSTERIOUS PATRON?

I KNOW HIM AS *LOKI*, THE BETRAYER. AND HE CAN ASSUME *MANY* FORMS--*HA*--AS WELL AS *EITHER* SEX!

BE HE SPIDER OR CRONE OR SIX-LEGGED MARE...*LOKI DEFIES ALL!*

GLGG--

AND YOU... ENGLISHMAN. WHAT IS *YOUR* PERCEPTION OF OUR HOST?

HUMBLE *FITZHUGH*...AT YOUR SERVICE, GOOD SIR.

AND I CAME HERE SEEKING *OLD SCRATCH*, AS HE IS COMMONLY KNOWN IN THE LAND OF MY BIRTH. A MOST DIRE AND SPRITELY IMP IS HE!

IT IS LATE...AND I'VE HEARD THIS MAGPIE CHIRP ENOUGH ALREADY. GOOD EVENING.

OF BLACKENED SKIN AND CLOVEN HOOF, *SCRATCH* DOTH DANCE ACROSS THE ROOFTOPS OF BOTH SAINT AND SINNER ALIKE!

AS HOWLING MINIONS GAMBOL IN HIS WAKE.

HE IS *NEITHER* MAN NOR BEAST! *FORSOOTH*, HE WEARS--

TO WEAVE CHARMS AND CAST SPELLS IS ONE THING.

IT IS ANOTHER LEVEL ENTIRELY TO COMMAND THE VERY ELEMENTS THEMSELVES!

A MOST IMPRESSIVE DISPLAY...

ESPECIALLY FOR ONE BUT MERELY A *YEAR* INTO THE TRIALS OF MAGIC. I'M *IMPRESSED* THAT YOU TRY YOUR HAND AT WEATHER WEAVING, MILORD *DRACULA.*

AND WHAT DRAWS YOU OUT ON SUCH AN EVENING, MADAM...?

NAKEISHA.

COLLECTING *MOONFLOWERS...* ALSO KNOWN AS *DEVIL'S TRUMPETS.* THEIR POISON IS INCREDIBLY POWERFUL AND USEFUL IN MANY POTIONS.

TO WHAT PURPOSE?

WELL... AS AN ANTIDOTE, FOR ONE. THERE ARE MANY VENOMOUS SERPENTS IN MY COUNTRY.

IN MY LAND... HARDY BOOTS AND A STRONG HEEL ARE HOW WE DEAL WITH DEADLY VIPERS.

OF WHICH, ADMITTEDLY... THERE AREN'T MANY.

WALLACHIA IS A LAND OF SOARING MOUNTAINS AND MANY TALL TREES. LIKE *HERE*...ONLY FAR LUSHER.

IT SOUNDS BEAUTIFUL.

I COME FROM A LAND OF GRASSY PLAINS EDGED BY THICKLY GROWN JUNGLES.

IT IS *ALSO* BEAUTIFUL.

YESSS... SO VERY CLOSE.

YOU SOUND ANXIOUS, *JALAL.* WHAT ARE YOU STUDYING?

ALCHEMY!

I AM VERY NEAR UNCOVERING THE SECRET OF TURNING BASE METALS INTO THE PUREST *GOLD!*

SUCH AN UNLIMITED SUPPLY OF WEALTH WILL GO FAR IN LIBERATING EGYPT FROM ITS OPPRESSORS.

Feh! YOU CAN NOT *BUY OFF* CONQUERORS!

THE ONLY PROPER RESPONSE TO INVADERS IS TO UTTERLY CRUSH THEM AND RAISE THEIR HEADS ON A FOREST OF PIKES.

BUT GO AHEAD AND PLAY WITH YOUR SHINY STONES, MY FRIEND.

ALLAH'S BEARD! THAT MAN IS INFURIATING!

Hmm... YES. THAT'S *ONE* WORD FOR IT.

FOR THE MOST PART, MY COMRADES ARE FOOLS.

THEY DABBLE WITH ILLUSIONS AND TRANSFIGURATIONS...INSTEAD OF WIELDING TRUE POWER.

I GROW WEARY OF SUCH FOLLY.

HERE, THE NIGHTTIME IS ENDLESS... AND OUR MYSTIC STUDIES, LONELY BY NATURE.

PERHAPS YOU MIGHT PREFER SOME COMPANY THIS EVENING?

HOW DID... YOU GET IN HERE?

WHY, MILORD ***DRACULA***... FOR ALL YOUR ADEPT PROWESS, HAVE YOU NOT YET LEARNED THE SKILL OF PASSING UNSEEN?

IT HAS OCCURRED TO ME THAT SEVEN YEARS IS A *LONG* TIME TO SPEND WITHOUT A MAN'S SPEAR BETWEEN MY LEGS.

AND, OF ALL THE STUDENTS AT THIS MOST *EXCLUSIVE* ACADEMY...I FIND YOU BY FAR THE MOST INTRIGUING.

HOW... DO YOU FIND ME?

LOVELY AS THE MOON THROUGH PARTING CLOUDS.

AND WELCOME AS THE FINEST WINE, NA--NAK--

"NAK-A-*EE*-SHA." SEE? IT'S NOT SO HARD, MILORD DRAC--

VLAD. AND, YES... I THINK YOU'LL FIND IT *VERY* HARD.

IN TRUTH... I HAVE *LONGED* TO SEE IF YOUR DUSKY SKIN IS AS *TASTY* AS IT APPEARS.

Mmm... I AM *VERY* DELICIOUS, HANDSOME VLAD. SPICY AND DELECTABLE...

ISN'T THIS... AGAINST THE RULES IN SOME FASHION?

WELL... IT HAS NO BEARING ON OUR TRAINING.

BESIDES...I WOULD'VE THOUGHT YOU ONLY *TOO* WILLING TO BREAK THE RULES!

IF IT SERVED MY ENDS.

BUT I'VE SACRIFICED MUCH FOR THIS CHANCE TO HARVEST SUCH POWER. I WOULD NOT SQUANDER THAT.

AS HAVE I. AND I SUPPOSE NEITHER OF US WOULD CARE TO STIR THE CAULDRON OF IDLE GOSSIP.

SO PERHAPS WE'D BEST KEEP THIS PAIRING AS OUR LITTLE SECRET... FOR NOW.

WISELY SAID.

BUT THAT'S NOT TO SAY I WISH SUCH MEETINGS TO END...

NOR DO I. HAVE NO FEAR... I WILL VISIT YOUR BEDCHAMBER AGAIN.

I KNOW THE WAY.

AND DON'T WORRY...*NONE* SHALL SEE ME PASS.

WITHIN THE *SCHOLOMANCE*, ALL THE LANGUAGES OF MAN WERE LAID BARE.

BUT IT WAS THE LANGUAGE OF BEASTS WHICH I WOULD NOW MASTER.

AND WHAT CREATURE WAS MORE A MIRROR OF MY OWN FERAL SOUL?

GRRRRR!

Greetings, my savage one! I once met a cousin of yours, many moons bygone.

What a fine and mighty specimen you are...but here stands one who would COMMAND your fealty.

RRAAGH!

ENOUGH! Bow down before your lord and master!

WHINNE WHINNE

Excellent, my savage friend.

You are ALL my cherished brethren... the untamed CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT!

TABOO

WELL DONE, IMPALER.

YOUR PROGRESS IS *MOST* IMPRESSIVE...AND YOUR GRIMOIRE IS COPIOUS, CLEAR, AND CONCISE. AN EXCEPTIONAL COMPENDIUM.

YOUR MASTER COMMENDS YOU.

THE REST OF YOU MIGHT LEARN FROM YOUR COMRADE'S EXAMPLE. HE HAS ACHIEVED MORE IN THREE YEARS THAN MANY OF THE SCHOLOMANCE'S FINEST GRADUATES!

THIS IS NO CASUAL EXERCISE. YOU EMBRACE. I DEMAND THE *HIGHEST* STANDARDS FROM MY DARK SCHOLARS.

WHEN I RETURN IN SIX MONTHS FOR MY NEXT ASSESSMENT... I EXPECT TO SEE SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS FROM SOME OF YOU.

OTHERWISE, EXPECT TO SPEND ETERNITY ENJOYING MY...LESS WELCOMING HOSPITALITY.

WELL DONE, VLAD.

ODIN'S BALLS... HE SAID MINE WAS *BARELY* LEGIBLE!

GODDAMMIT! WHAT'S THE POINT OF ALL THIS READING... AND WRITING...AND OTHER MUCK?!

I CAN'T KEEP UP WITH ALL THIS CATTLE SHIT!

AND IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF YOU, GOLDEN BOY...THE DEVIL'S BITCH!

DO YOU DREAM OF SUCKING HIS THORNY COCK?! STICKING YOUR TONGUE UP HIS ICY ASSHOLE?!!

SIGURDSSON... STOP!

ANSWER ME, FUCKFACE!!

ŞERPI.

WHA--?! HELHEIM!!

N-NO...
AAGGH!!
S-SOMEBODY HELP ME! CUT THEM OFF... CUT THEM OFF!!
IGNORANT OX... PERHAPS YOU SHOULD'VE STUDIED HARDER!
AAAIEEEE!
VLAD...ENOUGH OF THIS. RELEASE HIM FROM THE SPELL!
LET HIM FREE HIMSELF. AFTER ALL...WE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO HELP EACH OTHER.
VRYLAAT!
I HAVE NEVER SUFFERED FOOLS.

PETRE... I-I DON'T THINK WE SHOULD FISH THESE WATERS. THIS LAKE... IT'S SAID TO BE HAUNTED!

SO IT WON'T BE OVERTRAWLED! THERE'S BOUND TO BE PLENTY OF CATCH DOWN BELOW!

THE WATER... IT'S SO STILL. AND SO QUIET!

STOP COMPLAINING, FERKA! IF WE DON'T CATCH ANYTHING AFTER A FEW CASTS, WE'LL CALL IT QUITS.

PETRE... THE SUN IS GOING DOWN! I-ISN'T WHAT WE'VE ALREADY CAUGHT ENOUGH?

ARE YOU CRAZY?! WE'RE DOING GREAT... JUST ONE MORE CAST.

WHAT THE HELL--?!

THE WIND... SO SUDDEN--

WHAT IS HAPPENING?!

FERKA... OUR CATCH!!

MOTHER OF GOD!

FERKA... HANG ON!

YAAAGHH!

HELP!

PETRE... YOU KNOW I...CAN'T SWIM--!

WATER... S-SO COLD. FERKA!

G-GLUG-G!

TO COMMAND THE ELEMENTS... IS A HALLMARK OF TRUE POWER.

IT ALL COMES SO EASILY TO YOU, DOESN'T IT?

THE REST OF US STRUGGLE AND STRIVE... AND YOU JUST SOAR HIGH ABOVE US ALL.

NOT EXACTLY SO. I *WORK HARD* FOR ALL MY ACHIEVEMENTS.

IS IT A CRIME THAT I'M PARTICULARLY ADEPT AT SPELLCRAFT?

YET STILL...YOU *ALWAYS* SEEM TO GET IT. GRANTED, SOME OF THE OTHERS AREN'T AS DILIGENT...BUT I *WORK HARD TOO!*

NAKI... WHAT'S BOTHERING YOU?

I'VE BEEN...TRYING TO ASSUME ANIMAL FORM. IT'S TAKEN ME MONTHS AND I HAVE YET TO SUCCESSFULLY TRANSMORPH.

I THINK I MIGHT HAVE TO RESORT TO... *THE MIRROR'S AID.*

BUT I MASTERED THAT *MONTHS AGO!* I COULD--

DON'T SAY IT!

WE ARE FORBIDDEN FROM HINDERING *OR* HELPING EACH OTHER.

IT'S SOMETHING THAT I'LL JUST HAVE TO WORK OUT ON MY OWN.

THERE'S NO NEED TO CAST A GLAMOUR ABOUT YOURSELF, MADAM.

I WOULD SEE THROUGH IT ANYWAY.

WHAT DO YOU WANT, JALAL?

I KNOW THE TWO OF YOU ARE BED PARTNERS. BUT YOU SHOULD BEWARE OF GROWING TOO CLOSE TO THIS MAN.

HE HUNGERS ONLY FOR POWER... AND IS LOYAL TO NO ONE! AS A MILITARY LEADER, HIS CRUELTY WAS LEGENDARY... EVEN IN THE FAR-OFF STREETS OF CAIRO.

YOU SOUND DESPERATE, JALAL. ARE YOU SURE IT ISN'T *ENVY* THAT GIVES VOICE TO YOUR CAUTION?

EVEN AN ENVIOUS WARNING SHOULD BE HEEDED, RECKLESS GIRL!

THIS *WOMAN* HAS HEARD YOUR ADVICE, SIR. NOW...LEAVE ME BE.

SOMETHING HAD ALWAYS TROUBLED ME, THERE IN THE CONFINES OF THAT SHADOW WORLD.

I SENSED...an OMINOUS PRESENCE, DEEP IN THE BOWELS OF THAT REALM. SOMETHING THAT THROBBED WITH a TERRIBLE POWER.

YET DORMANT.

SOMETHING--

RRAAGH!

Huh--?! NAKEISHA, WHAT...?

DON'T YOU SEE? I FINALLY DID IT!

I ASKED *THE MIRROR* FOR HELP... AND *IT* REVEALED THE SECRETS OF TRANSFORMATION TO ME!

NOW I CAN *RUN* WITH THE BEASTS OF MY HOMELAND-- *WILD AND FREE!*

THAT SEEMS... A TRIVIAL PURSUIT FOR SUCH AN ABILITY.

OKAY, SMARTASS... MISTER "OH-I-LEARNED-THAT-*MONTHS*-AGO."

AND HOW DO *YOU* PLAN TO USE THIS SAME FACULTY?

HOW WILL I USE THE OTHERWORLDLY POWERS I HAVE GAINED FROM THIS RETREAT?

THE VERY SAME WAY I USED MY AGENCY AS A WARLORD AND LEADER OF MY PEOPLES.

ALWAYS...

TO TERRORIZE AND DESTROY MY ENEMIES!

AND NEED I REMIND YOU, VLAD...THAT I *AM NOT* ONE OF THOSE!

NO...NO, OF COURSE YOU'RE NOT.

MY APOLOGIES FOR SUCH... *DRAMATIC* LICENSE.

ACTUALLY, THIS NEWFOUND SKILL COMES AT AN OPPORTUNE TIME.

HOW SO?

I PLAN ON TRAVELING SOUTH, INTO THE HINTERLANDS. A JOURNEY THAT WILL TAKE A WEEK OR MORE.

BUT, THE SUNLIGHT--

I WILL SLEEP DURING THE DAYTIME, WELL HIDDEN AND WRAPPED IN MY CLOAK. IF I HAVE NEED TO ESCAPE THE SUN...I CAN DASH IN LEOPARD FORM FASTER THAN ON TWO FEET.

AS YOU EXPLAINED, VIPERS ARE NOT COMMON IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD... ASIDE FROM ***ROCK ADDERS.*** THIS IS THEIR MATING SEASON AND I MEAN TO HARVEST AS MUCH OF THEIR VENOM AS I CAN.

WHY?

TO EXPAND MY SUPPLY OF ANTIVENIN...FOR WHEN I RETURN HOME. THAT SMALL VIAL WILL COUNTERACT ENOUGH POISON TO KILL AN ELEPHANT.

WITH ANY LUCK, I'LL MAKE IT BACK HERE BEFORE THE ***DARK LORD'S*** NEXT INSPECTION.

YOU'LL NOT MISS ME *TOO* MUCH, I HOPE?

OF COURSE I WILL...BUT I'LL BE FINE.

BE SAFE IN YOUR TRAVELS.

YOU'VE HAD TO POSTPONE YOUR DEPARTURE, I SEE. *UNSEASONABLE* WEATHER.

DID HE EVEN CONSIDER THAT...WHEN HE CONJURED UP THIS MAELSTROM? DOES HE REGARD *ANYTHING*... BUT THE SCOPE OF HIS OWN POWER?

LEAVE ME ALONE, JALAL.

HAVE YOU EVEN A FRACTION OF SUCH WEATHERCRAFT? CAN YOU EVEN MAKE THE BREEZE BLOW?

NO.

KA-BOOM

IT'S FOR THE BEST THAT YOU ARE LEAVING. THE REST OF US...CANNOT TOLERATE HIS DOMINANCE ANY LONGER.

WE'VE ALL EXHAUSTED OUR THREE MIRROR BOONS...WITH ONLY ONE REMAINING. WE WILL SUMMON ITS AID TO DETERMINE THE BEST WAY OF UNDOING HIM.

IF YOU ATTEMPT TO STOP US...OR TO WARN HIM, WE WILL ELIMINATE YOU AS WELL.

HE IS A DANGER TO US ALL.

THE FEELING OF UNEASE I HAD EXPERIENCED... WAS IT ONLY A SENSATION OF FOREBODING?

OR WAS IT THE FAMILIAR ECHO OF BETRAYAL, AS WHEN *RADU* FIRST TURNED AGAINST ME?

MIRROR... WHO HERE SEEKS TO UNDERMINE ME? *WHO* WISHES ME HARM?

*YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS CONSPIRE TO LAUNCH AN INSURRECTION AGAINST YOU. **ALL** WILL BETRAY YOU.*

ALL?!

ALL.

EVEN...*HER?*

BETRAYAL...ITS UGLY STAIN HAD HAUNTED MY ENTIRE EXISTENCE.

FROM MY FATHER'S TRADING ME AS A HOSTAGE TO THE TURKS. TO MY BROTHER LEADING A REVOLT TO UNSEAT MY CLAIM TO THE THRONE.

TO MY WIFE ABANDONING ME IN FAVOR OF HER OWN PITIABLE DESPAIR.

THE ONLY POSSIBLE RESPONSE TO SUCH TREACHERY...

...IS TO RETURN IT IN KIND.

I TELL YOU--WE CANNOT AFFORD TO WAIT ANY LONGER! THE MORE WE LINGER UNDECIDED... THERE'S NO TELLING HOW POWERFUL HE MIGHT BECOME!

UNTIL WE ARE DEFENSELESS TO STAND AGAINST HIM!

I FIND I MUST OBJECT. VERILY, NONE OF US DENY HIS ARROGANT WAYS...BUT WE ARE ***MOST EXPRESSLY*** DENIED TO CAUSE HARM--

HIS VERY PRESENCE HARMS AND BELITTLES ALL OF US IN THE EYES OF THE ***DARK LORD!***

SOME OF US HAVE ACUTELY FELT THE BITTER STING OF THAT MEASURE...AM I CORRECT?

Grmph-- AYE... ***AGREED!***

SO I SAY WE MUST ***ACT!*** LET ALL WHO ARE IN AGREEMENT... LEND THEIR ASSENT!

AYE!

AYE.

AYE.

AYE!

INDEED... SUCH A DECIDEDLY ***AGREEABLE*** GROUP!

GOOD EVENING, MY FRIENDS!

HOW... *CONVENIENT* TO FIND US ALL SO NEATLY ASSEMBLED.

AS WE NEAR ANOTHER VISIT BY OUR INFERNAL HOST...ALLOW ME TO RAISE A GLASS TO ALL OF YOUR EFFORTS BEFORE HIS UPCOMING INSPECTION.

I'M SURE YOU WILL *ALL* PERFORM MOST EXCELLENTLY!

COME NOW... WHO WILL JOIN ME IN A TOAST TO OUR MUTUAL ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE ETERNAL GLORY OF OUR DARK AND DIABOLICAL BENEFACTOR?

VERY WELL.

AYE.

YES...

THAT'S THE SPIRIT!

TO THE LORD AND PATRON OF THE NOTORIOUS SCHOLOMANCE...

...HAIL SATAN!

HAIL SATAN. HAIL SATAN!

HAIL SATAN. HAIL... SATAN.

THAT'S IT...DRINK DEEPLY, MY FRIENDS. THIS IS A SPECIAL VINTAGE OF...MOONFLOWER WINE!

GREETINGS, MY SORCEROUS SCHOLARS.

ONCE AGAIN, I AM COME TO ASCERTAIN THE DEPTH AND SCOPE OF YOUR TRAINING.

WHO WILL STAND FIRST BENEATH MY EXACTING SCRUTINY?

WHO DARES BE--

WELL NOW...

SOMEONE'S BEEN BUSY.

AND NEEDLESS TO SAY... I *RECOGNIZE* THE HANDIWORK.

YET I SEE ONLY EIGHT STAKES OCCUPIED. WHERE IS THE REMAINING SCHOLAR...THE AFRICAN?

GREETINGS, OH DARK LORD.

AS YOU SEE... I'M AFRAID THE RANKS OF THE SCHOLOMANCE HAVE SUFFERED A STRINGENT *THRESHING.* INDEED, THESE OTHER CADETS... WERE NOTHING BUT *CHAFF.*

THE WOMAN HAS GONE FORAGING. SHE WILL HAVE HER TURN.

AND THUS... I AM NOW THE SOLE CLAIMANT TO STAND AS YOUR CHAMPION.

YES, WELL... I *DO* RELISH SUCH RUTHLESS INITIATIVE.

SINCE YOU ARE THE LAST MAN STANDING...COME WITH ME AND BEAR WITNESS TO THE ULTIMATE REWARD OF YOUR VICTORY.

BRING ONE OF THE TORCHES.

ONE OF MANKIND'S MANY SHORTCOMINGS IS THEIR RECKLESS AVIDITY.

I, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE WAITED EONS FOR THE ADVENT OF MY EARTHLY KINGDOM... A DOOM THAT IS WRIT EVEN IN HEAVEN'S CELESTIAL REGISTER.

AS THE DEVIL LED ME DEEPER INTO THE BOWELS OF HIS DOMAIN, I AGAIN FELT THAT PULSING SENSE OF AN OVERWHELMING PRESENCE.

AS IF THE ROCKY WALLS THEMSELVES WERE... *BREATHING.*

MY FORBEARANCE TRANSCENDS EVEN THE PATIENCE OF-- WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THAT ZEALOUS FOOL GOD ONCE GRANTED ME AS A PLAYTHING?

AH, YES.. *JOB.*

ON THE DAY OF THAT CALAMITOUS UPHEAVAL...I SHALL UNLEASH A HERALD WORTHY OF MY MALEVOLENT MAJESTY.

BEHOLD... THE *BEAST* OF THE *APOCALYPSE!*

"IT HAS SLUMBERED SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME...INSENSATE TO HUMANITY'S FUMBLINGS AND THE DOMINION OF GOD.

"BUT AT THE END OF DAYS... *MY* SOVEREIGNTY WILL AT LAST FALL UPON MANKIND.

"WHAT THE CHRIST LOVERS CALL *ARMAGEDDON*...AND THE RUGGED NORSEMEN, *RAGNARÖK.*"

AT THAT DARK AND DELIRIOUS HOUR, MY FINAL CHAMPION SHALL RIDE FORTH ON THIS AWAKENED LEVIATHAN.

THENCEFORTH TO RAIN HELLFIRE AND DESTRUCTION OVER ALL THE LANDS OF THE EARTH.

PERHAPS... THAT SHALL BE *YOU.*

FOR YOU ARE INDEED ONE OF MY MOST AUDACIOUS AND CAPABLE SLAVES.

YOU... DO ME A GREAT HONOR, LORD SATAN.

BUT I AM SLAVE TO NONE!

DIE, DEVIL!

ANGHH!

CAPABLE *AND* CUNNING. WITH A MANIFEST TALENT FOR TREACHERY. TRULY... YOU ARE A MOST SWEET AND SINGULAR FIEND!

YET... YOU SEEK TO IMPALE ME WITH A *CRUCIFIX?* I...WHO CARVED THE CROSS OF GOLGOTHA *MYSELF.*

SUCH "SACRED" TRINKETS MEAN LITTLE TO ME...NO MATTER WHAT HOLLOW COMFORTS THEY MAY GRANT TO THE FEEBLE MINDED.

NOW THEN... AS TO THAT WHICH YOU HAVE *STOLEN* FROM ME.

GGAH!

AN *ENTIRE* CONTINGENT OF MY SATANIC EMISSARIES... ERADICATED.

DID YOU REALLY THINK SUCH A TRANSGRESSION WOULD PASS *UNREWARDED?*

I THINK NOT.

I CONSIGN YOU TO A LIVING DEATH...AND A BLOOD THIRST UNMATCHED BY EVEN YOUR WORST ATROCITIES.

I HAD TASTED...

...THE BLOOD OF *SATAN!*

UNSPEAKABLE AGONY COURSED THROUGHOUT MY EVERY VEIN.

AAGGGHHH!!!

BLAZING, QUITE LITERALLY... LIKE HELLFIRE.

MY HEART RACED AS IF IT MIGHT EXPLODE.

AND THEN... STOPPED.

I ROSE...I KNEW NOT HOW MUCH LATER.

BITTERLY COLD AND GASPING FOR BREATH.

=GHHAA!=

I WAS ALONE... ABANDONED DEEP IN THE CAVERNOUS DEPTHS.

AND SOMEHOW... CHANGED.

DESPITE THE FACT THAT I HAD NO FLAME...I COULD SEE QUITE CLEARLY THROUGH THE STYGIAN DARKNESS.

YET I WAS STRICKEN WITH A GNAWING HUNGER, THE LIKES OF WHICH I'D NEVER FELT.

AS IF I'D BEEN STARVING FOR DAYS, WEEKS... EVEN MONTHS!

I HAD TO ESCAPE THAT DESOLATE TOMB.

OVER DAYS, I SCRAMBLED AND SEARCHED FOR A WAY OUT.

IN MY EMPTY DELIRIUM, FORGETTING EVERY SORCERY.

AND STILL... THE HUNGER CONSUMED ME.

THE AWFUL, ENDLESS HUNGER.

UNTIL, AT LAST... LIBERATION TAUNTED ME.

SO CLOSE... YET SO FAR. BUT THEN...

THE VERY WILL TO PASS ON... *TRANSFORMED* ME.

THIS WAS NO SPELLCRAFT I'D LEARNED FROM SATAN'S ARCHIVES.

THIS WAS... SOMETHING *NEW.*

AHH... THIS IS ONE SNAKE WRANGLER WHO NEEDS A HOT MEAL AND A WARM BED.

AND PERHAPS... *mmm*...A CERTAIN BED *WARMER!*

SACRED ANCESTORS--!

WHAT... *WHAT* HAS HAPPENED HERE?!

VLAD! VLAD... WHERE ARE YOU?!

VLAD... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!

NO ONE... THERE'S NO ONE LEFT! BUT, *HOW?!*

I... I CANNOT STAY HERE!

I MUST... *FLY* FROM THIS CURSED PLACE!!

NOW...BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE. S-SCHOLOMANCE BE DAMNED!

N-NAKI...!

VLAD!

NAKI...Y-YOU MUST *HELP* ME! SOMETHING HAS...HAPPENED TO ME! SOMETHING FOUL AND PERVERSE...!

WH-WHY CAN I NOT *CROSS THIS THRESHOLD?!*

NO! STAY BACK!

VLAD...WH-WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE?!* YOU... YOU *MURDERED* ALL OF THEM! I KNOW WHAT THEY INTENDED, BUT--

WAS I... *ALSO* MEANT AS ONE OF YOUR VICTIMS?!

NO! YOU...YOU MUST BELIEVE ME. I NEVER MEANT YOU *ANY* HARM!

NOT *YOU!* O-ONLY MY ENEMIES...

LIAR! I SAW IT, VLAD... THE FINAL STAKE! THE ONE YOU SAVED *FOR ME!!*

N-NO! IT WAS ONLY A RUSE! I DIDN'T... I DON'T--

AAGGGH...
SATAN HAS CURSED ME!
THE PAIN!!
OBLIVION, TAKE ME...THE PAAAAIN!!
VLAD...WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?!
C-COME HERE, MY LOVE!
YESSSS...
GGAH! MY... MY VERY BONES ACHE WITH A PROFANE NEED!
VLAD, IT'S ALL RIGHT... LET ME HELP YOU!
COME... LIE DOWN ON THE BED.
N-NAKI, I...I'M SORRY.
BUT, IF YOU'RE GOING TO ADMIT A MAN TO YOUR BEDCHAMBER...

MAKE SURE TO LET THE RIGHT ONE IN!

I WILL NEVER FORGET THE FRENZY OF THAT FIRST FEEDING.

IT WAS THE DEEPEST ECSTASY I'D EVER KNOWN.

THE CRUELEST MOMENT I'D EVER EMBRACED.

MY DEAR, BRAVE, AND DEFIANT *NAKEISHA*...

I DRAINED HER DRY AS A SHEAF OF WHEAT.

OBVIOUSLY...I WAS NO STRANGER TO VIOLENCE AND DEATH. YET I STARED IN STUNNED DISBELIEF AT HER LIFELESS BODY.

DEAD BY MY HAND. DEAD BY MY KISS.

HOW HAD THIS... *UNTHINKABLE* EVENT COME TO PASS?

NOW DO YOU SEE, OH IMPALER? MY CURSE IS YOUR PENANCE... BUT ALSO YOUR REWARD.

BY THE SAME BLOOD YOU HAVE ALWAYS SO CASUALLY SPILLED, NOW YOU WILL LIVE FOREVER...YET BOUND TO THE NIGHT AS A CREATURE OF MY MAKING.

NO MERE MINDLESS *REVENANT, STRIGOI, OR WURDULAC*... YOU ARE THE FIRST OF A NEW BREED OF UNDEAD.

A TRUE *VAMPIRE!*

UNCLEAN AND GODFORSAKEN...

...YOU HAVE DONE THIS TO ME!!

DON'T BE SO OBTUSE...YOU BROUGHT THIS FATE ON *YOURSELF.*

INDEED... YOU *EMBRACED* IT.

MORE THAN MOST, YOU HAVE ALWAYS HUNGERED FOR POWER.

AND MANKIND'S VORACITY FOR SUCH DOMINION IS NOTHING MORE THAN AN *ARGUMENT WITH DEATH.*

A DEBATE WHICH, NOW, YOU HAVE EFFECTIVELY WON.

STILL... YOU ARE NOT INVULNERABLE.

THERE ARE LIMITATIONS AS WELL AS ADVANTAGES TO YOUR NEW QUINTESSENCE.

COMBINED WITH THE SORCERIES YOU HAVE MASTERED, TRULY YOU ARE NOW ONE OF MY *GREATEST* AND *DEADLIEST* EARTHLY AGENTS.

YET BE CAUTIOUS... LEST YOU SUFFER THE SAME FATE AS THESE YOU SO EASILY CONQUERED.

IMPALEMENT MAY STILL DESTROY YOU... OH IMPALER!

SO TOO, THE SIGILS OF FAITH WILL CAUSE YOU TORTUROUS PAIN.

BUT FOR NOW... YOU ARE VICTORIOUS, LAST SURVIVOR OF THE DREADED SCHOLOMANCE.

I TRUST YOU WILL NOT WASTE THE DISTINCTION.

"GO NOW... AND FURTHER MY DESIGNS WITH YOUR SUBLIME WICKEDNESS.

"AS YOU ARE NOW A CREATURE OF THE GRAVE, YOU MUST REST IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE EARTH.

"YOU WILL GAIN THE GREATEST STRENGTH FROM THE SOIL OF YOUR HOMELAND.. BUT ANY CLAY WILL SUFFICE.

"SUCH A LIMITATION WILL MAKE TRAVEL DIFFICULT.

"THUS, I BEQUEATH YOU A BAND OF DEDICATED ESCORTS...A NOMADIC TRIBE IN MY DIABOLIC THRALL.

"THEY WILL FIGHT TO THE DEATH IN SERVICE OF YOUR NEEDS.

"EVERY NIGHT, YOU WILL RISE FROM YOUR EARTHEN SEPULCHER...

"EMPOWERED BY DARKNESS, DRIVEN BY DESIRE.

"IN ANSWER TO THAT UNHOLY CRAVING...YOU WILL FEED ON THE BLOOD OF THE LIVING.

"SPREADING TERROR LIKE AN INSIDIOUS PESTILENCE.

"AHH... DELICIOUSLY SO.

"FAREWELL, IMPALER.

"I WILL DELIGHT IN THE COMING CENTURIES OF YOUR GRAND AND GRISLY INFAMY."

AND SO...AFTER MANY YEARS, I WAS HEADED HOME AGAIN.

THE GYPSY CLAN PROVED LOYAL TO THE MAN. THEY HAVE BEEN MY UNWAVERING SERVANTS FOR GENERATIONS NOW.

THEY ARE STOIC AND UNFAZED BY ANY UNUSUAL NOCTURNAL ACTIVITIES.

IN MY NEW CAPACITY, I COULD NOT MERELY RETURN TO *WALLACHIA*...AS IF NOTHING HAD CHANGED IN MY ABSENCE.

INSTEAD, I VENTURED NORTH... TAKING REFUGE IN AN ABANDONED CASTLE MY FATHER HAD ONCE BRIEFLY OCCUPIED.

IN TRANSYLVANIA.
EAST OF THE BORGO PASS.

YET THERE WAS ONE THING THAT I HAD TO RECOUP FROM THE CONQUERING TURKS.

‹YOUR EXCELLENCY, I--AAAGH!!›

ONE OF THE CAMP SLAVES WAS EASILY ENSNARED... AND INVITED MY ENTRY INTO THEIR MASTER'S TENT, ALONG WITH THE EVENING MEAL.

‹ALLAH'S TEARS! OH, THE CALAMITY...MURDER! MURDER!›

‹WHAT IS IT, YOU FOOL? WHAT'S WRONG?!›

‹THE SULTAN! THE SULTAN HAS BEEN KILLED! HIS THROAT IS TORN OUT AS IF BY SOME SAVAGE BEAST! OHHH...CATASTROPHE!›

‹SEARCH THE AREA! FIND THE KILLER!›

‹WAIT... WHAT WAS THAT?!›

‹CAREFUL, YOU IDIOT! IT WAS ONLY A BAT...›

I KNEW *MEHMET* WOULD HAVE RETAINED MY MEDALLION AS A TROPHY OF HIS VICTORY.

I WOULD'VE DONE THE SAME.

BUT NOW...I HAD RETURNED TO THE MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS THAT FIRST SPAWNED ME. TO THE BLESSED "LAND BEYOND THE FORESTS."

I HAD BECOME MORE POWERFUL THAN I EVER DREAMED.

I WOULD RECLAIM MY SOVEREIGNTY.

AND MY BIRTHRIGHT.

LET ALL MY ENEMIES ONCE AGAIN FEAR THE NAME AND WRATH OF...

Dracula!

THE END of BOOK 1

THE KEY TO ANY GREAT COMICS COLLABORATION IS CLEAR COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE WRITER AND ARTIST. IN MY SCRIPTS, I ALWAYS TRY TO GET ACROSS THE GIST OF WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE PANELS IN THE FIRST EMPHASIZED WORD OR TWO, WITH FURTHER DESCRIPTION TO CLARIFY. AS YOU CAN SEE, KELLEY'S TRANSLATION OF MY SCRIPT AMOUNTS TO A STRIKINGLY PERFECT CREATIVE SYMBIOSIS.

PAGES FOUR & FIVE

1) **TWO-PAGE SPREAD— of VLAD III, THE FUCKING IMPALER!** . . . smiling grimly with his arms slightly spread out to the sides as he stands among a forest of bloody and broken bodies that are impaled on long, upright stakes. Men, women and children alike are skewered and dangling . . . A TON of them. Historically, this was an instance where Vlad impaled 20,000 people in an effort to intimidate his enemy . . . so go for it! Off to one side in the immediate distance, we can see the tents, horses, pennants and campfires of Vlad's army.

VLAD:
AHHH…THERE IS NOTHING QUITE SO INTOXICATING AS THE SULTRY DEATH MOANS OF THE DEFEATED.

WHAT SWEET MUSIC THEY MAKE!

CAPTION:
BATTLE OF TÂRGOVIȘTE. 1462.

INSET PANELS [stacked along the far side of the right page]

2) **AGAIN**—Constantin stands nearby as he urges Vlad to prepare for the coming battle.

CONSTANTIN:
VOVOIDE . . . YOU MUST HASTEN TO THE ARMORER'S AND BE FITTED FOR BATTLE. OUR ENEMY DRAWS DANGEROUSLY NEAR.

3) **VLAD GRIMACES**—at the prospect of facing what he knows is a likely defeat.

VLAD:
A BLOODY DAY DAWNS… WITH SCANT HOPE FOR TOMORROW. HAS THE CONTINGENCY PLAN BEEN PUT IN PLACE?

4) **OVER-HEAD SHOT**—as Vlad and Constantin walk thru the camp.

CONSTANTIN:
YES, MILORD. THE LIKENESS IS STRIKING. PRAY THAT WE HAVE NO NEED OF SUCH DESPERATE MEASURES.

VLAD:
INDEED.

IN NOMINE PATRI ET FILII ET SPIRITUS SANCTI.

DRACULA RISING

PAGE 4

DRACULA FIRST

PAGE 5

IN THE COURSE OF WRITING THIS BOOK, I OFTEN FOUND MYSELF DESCRIBING A SCENE AND THINKING, "OH, MAN . . . KELLEY'S GONNA DRAW THE HELL OUTTA THIS!" INEVITABLY, HIS RESULTS ALMOST ALWAYS EXCEEDED MY GREATEST EXPECTATIONS. SUCH WAS THE CASE WITH THE MAGNIFICENT AND UTTERLY BIZARRE DEMON GUARD THAT HE DESIGNED FOR THIS SCENE.

PAGE TWENTY-FIVE

1) **A LARGE DEMON**—sits on a rocky ledge beside the path. It's your call on how this guy should look but I'd say nothing too grand. This isn't a Hell-lord . . . just a lower-level guardian demon—a fiendish thug. 7 or 8 feet tall. It needs to look completely different from the Wurdulac though, demonic as opposed to ghoulish . . . however you imagine that.

DEMON:
SNRF--MENTION NOT THE NAME OF GOD HERE, NOMAD.

FOR BEYOND THIS POINT . . . YOU ENTER **THE DEVIL'S ACREAGE!**

2) **THE DEMON**—growls out a warning and cites the toll that must be paid for them to proceed any further.

DEMON:
AND NONE MAY PASS FURTHER WITHOUT A BLOOD TOLL.

DEATH AND SUFFERING . . . THEY ARE **HELL'S** CURSED CURRENCY!

3) **CONSTANTIN**—brandishes his sword, admonishing the demon and ready to fight. IN THE BACKGROUND, we can see Vlad drawing his own sword.

CONSTANTIN:
STAND ASIDE, UNHOLY FIEND! YOU WILL NOT TOUCH SO MUCH A HAIR OF THE VOIVODE'S HEAD!

FEAR NOT, MILORD . . . I WILL DEFEND YOU!

SIMILARLY, THE DEPICTION OF SATAN'S BEHEMOTH, A DRAGON OF IMMENSE PROPORTIONS AND REFERENCED FROM ACTUAL ROMANIAN FOLKLORE OF THE LEGENDARY SCHOLOMANCE, NEEDED TO BE IMPRESSIVE IN EVERY REGARD. THIS NEEDED TO BE THE BEAST THAT SATAN'S CHAMPION WILL SOMEDAY RIDE TO HERALD IN THE APOCALYPSE. AND, OF COURSE, KELLEY CAPTURED THIS GIANT MONSTER IN ALL ITS AWESOME GRANDEUR!

PAGES SEVENTY-FOUR & SEVENTY-FIVE

1) **TWO-PAGE SPREAD**—the small figures of Vlad and Satan stand on a rocky ledge. A vast cavern opens before them in which an ENORMOUS, COILED DRAGON lies sleeping, plumes of smoke curling up from its massive nostrils [We don't want to echo Smaug too much here, so no horde of gold and treasure . . . just a fucking HUGE dragon and any other hellish details you wanna add. Seriously . . . a BIIIIIIIG dragon.]

SATAN:

BEHOLD… THE BEAST OF THE APOCALYPSE!

IT HAS SLUMBERED SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME . . . INSENSATE TO HUMANITY'S FUMBLINGS AND THE DOMINION OF GOD.

BUT AT THE END OF DAYS . . . MY SOVEREIGNTY WILL AT LAST FALL UPON MANKIND.

WHAT THE CHRIST-LOVERS CALL ARMAGEDDO . . . AND THE RUGGED NORSEMEN, RAGNARÖK.

2) **SATAN EXPLAINS**—the dragon and Vlad's ultimate fate.

SATAN:

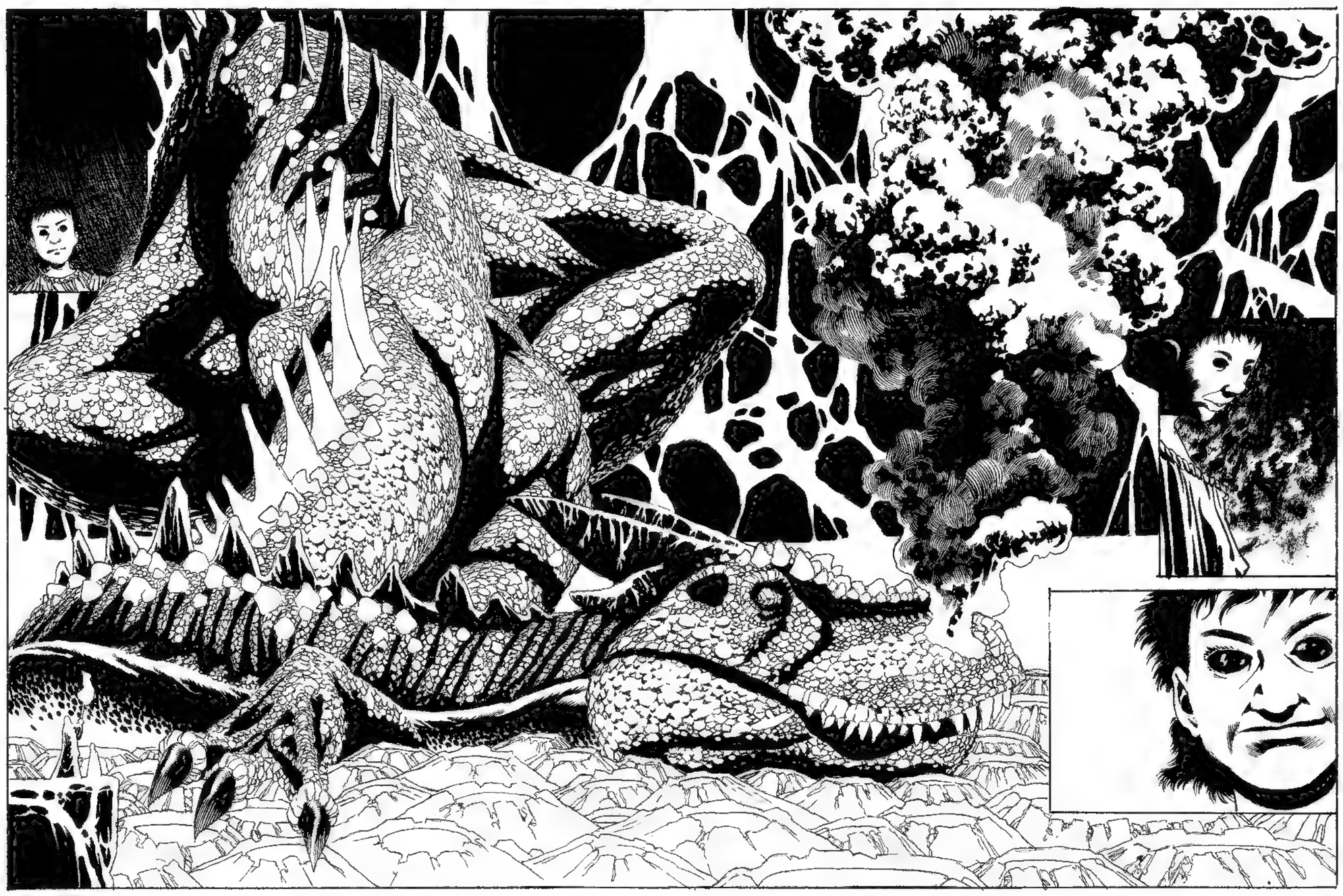
AT THAT DARK AND DELIRIOUS HOUR, MY FINAL CHAMPION SHALL RIDE FORTH ON THIS AWAKENED LEVIATHAN.

3) **HE SMILES**—black eyes glittering.

SATAN:

THEREFORE, TO RAIN HELLFIRE AND DESTRUCTION OVER ALL THE LANDS OF THE EARTH.

PERHAPS . . . THAT SHALL BE YOU.



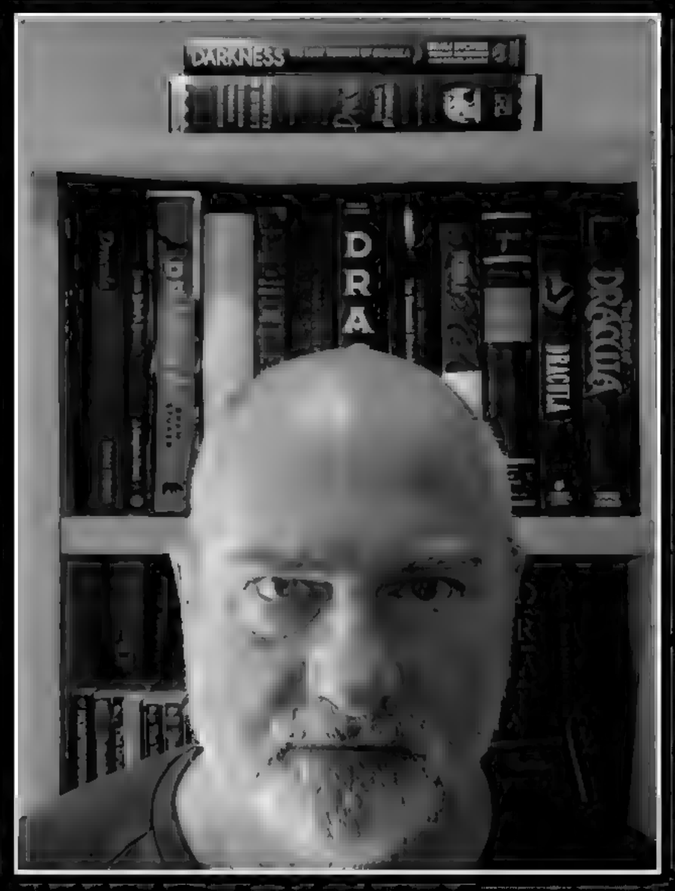
Of course, Kelley's most important visual rendition for this project would be his portrayal of Dracula himself. We wanted to faithfully follow his appearance as described by Stoker in the early chapters of the original novel while still adding our own distinctive visual flair.

In the novel, Dracula is an iconic combination of old-world courtliness combined with aristocratic arrogance and, seething beneath it all, a dark and feral savagery. His profane thirst for blood is matched only by his lust for power and dominion.

Here are Kelley's earliest character designs for our title character—one of the most infamous names in all of literature.

"I AM SUCH HUNGER . . . INCARNATE!"

MATT WAGNER has enjoyed a career in comics for overforty years and is best known for one of comicdom's most respected creator-owned titles--the centuries-spanning epic, *Grendel* and for his other, more personal, allegory, *Mage*. As both a writer and an artist, Matt has also worked on a wide variety of established characters over the years which include several landmark projects starring DC Comics icon, *Batman*, including two crossovers series with *Grendel*. His other mainstream work includes; *Sandman Mystery Theater*, *Dr. Mid-Nite*, *Green Arrow*, *Trinity*, *Madame Xanadu*, *Zorro*, *Green Hornet; Year One*, *The Shadow; Year One*, *The Shadow: The Death of Margo Lane*, *The Spirit Returns*, and *Django/Zorro*, which he co-wrote with renowned film-maker Quentin Tarantino.



Praised for his character-driven stories and his obvious love of world history and mythologies, Matt's efforts have won multiple Eisner Awards. He has also enjoyed the distinction of being one of the only writer/artists to team his own creation with one of DC's flagship characters in two successive *Batman/Grendel* crossover publications. He later continued the same motif in another critically acclaimed crossover event, writing and drawing *Grendel vs. The Shadow*.

His most recent work has been an all-new new rendition of the original *Grendel* storyline, *Devil by the Deed—Master's Edition*.

KELLEY JONES started his award-winning career in comics in 1982 and made his name with his bizarre and twisted vision of DC comics *Deadman* in 1988. Next came the his memorable run on Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* that contained the classic stories *Dream of a Thousand Cats* and the epic *Season of Mists* storyline. Kelley then cemented his transgressive and unique style on *Red Rain*, the Batman Vampire trilogy, one of the most successful Batman stories of all time. Jones then began a classic three year run on monthly Batman comic with his Red Rain collaborator Doug Moench. Kelley has also drawn the much lauded *Alien-Hive* mini series for Dark Horse and *Venom: The Madness* series for Marvel comics. His eccentric creator-owned hero The Hammer is a beloved cult classic which firmly established Kelley as a horror comics icon. Kelley has worked with comics great Len Wein on a celebrated *Swamp Thing* run and also with his hero Bernie Wrightson on Wrightson's magnum opus, *Frankenstein*.

Having been friends with Matt Wagner for more than thirty years, Kelley was desperate to work with him and finally reached that goal with *Dracula: The Impaler*.

THE BLOOD DRENCHED HISTORY OF
THE VAMPIRE LORD CONTINUES IN

DRACULA™

BOOK TWO: THE BRIDES

BY
MATT WAGNER
AND KELLEY JONES

COMING SOON

"WAGNER AND JONES HAVE—BRILLIANTLY, TERRIFYINGLY—FILLED IN THAT CRUCIAL GAP IN THE HISTORY OF VOIVODE DRACULA: HOW HE TRANSFORMED FROM A MONSTROUS WARRIOR INTO AN ACTUAL MONSTER! WHOLLY CONVINCING. TOTALLY CANONICAL—DON'T READ THIS WITHOUT A LOT OF GARLIC AND CROSSES AT HAND!"

—LESLIE S. KLINGER
EDITOR, *NEW ANNOTATED DRACULA*

"MAGNIFICENTLY PERVY, GLORIOUSLY GORY, AND DELIRIOUSLY DISTURBING, JONES & WAGNER'S *THE IMPALER* IS A FRIGHTENINGLY FRESH TAKE ON THE FEARSOME FANGED ONE!"

—JOE HILL
(NOS4A2, LOCKE & KEY)

DRACULA—THE VAMPIRE LORD WHOSE BLOODTHIRSTY ADVENTURES HAVE CAPTIVATED AND TERRIFIED GENERATIONS OF AUDIENCES FOR OVER A CENTURY. BRAM STOKER'S CLASSIC 1897 NOVEL INTRODUCED ARGUABLY THE MOST FAMOUS LITERARY CHARACTER OF ALL TIME, BUT HIS HISTORY AND ORIGINS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SHROUDED IN MYSTERY. NOW LEGENDARY COMIC CREATORS **MATT WAGNER** AND **KELLEY JONES** HAVE TEAMED UP TO UNVEIL THE SINISTER STORIES HIDDEN IN THE SHADOWS OF THE ORIGINAL LEGEND. THIS FIRST VOLUME OF AN ONGOING SERIES OF GRAPHIC NOVELS CHRONICLES THE TITLE CHARACTER'S ALL-CONSUMING LUST FOR POWER . . . AND THE UNHOLY LENGTHS HE WOULD GO TO ATTAIN SUCH DOMINION.

"MATT WAGNER, KELLEY JONES AND DRACULA ARE A MATCH MADE IN HELL, AND WE ARE LUCKY TO BE ON THIS EARTH AT THIS TIME TO SEE THEM COME TOGETHER."

—NEIL GAIMAN
(THE SANDMAN, AMERICAN GODS)

ORLOK PRESS

SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN... THIS MONSTER!"